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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0637

INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1955

RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8991

RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7229

RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5163

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3374

RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5119

RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 1396

RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0654

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4230

RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9552

RUEHB1/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6852

RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 1325

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3777

RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

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SUBJECT: MFA SECRETARY "SANGUINE" ON IDP ISSUE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR PATRICIA A. BUTENIS. REASONS: 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) In an October 20 meeting with Ambassador, new MFA Secretary Romesh Jayasinghe claimed that the government's attitude toward the IDP situation was changing for the better. Jayasinghe, who recently returned to Colombo after what was seen as a very successful stint as Sri Lankan high commissioner in New Delhi, said that a number of factors were contributing to the change. The GSL initially was overwhelmed by the numbers of IDPs and now was better able to deal with the problem. Also, initially -- since the military had the lead -- the GSL had started off dealing with the IDPs with a "military mindset." This mindset, both in terms of IDPs and in the wider approach to government policymaking, was now changing (he hinted at intentions to downgrade the military, which would be a natural reaction to the recent rise of former army chief and now CHOD Fonseka as a potential rival for the presidency).

¶2. (C) Jayasinghe argued that demining and security issues remained significant, but even these were better under control and headed toward resolution. These developments had led to a recognition in government circles that the costs of keeping the IDPs in the camps were outweighing the benefits, which made Jayasinghe "sanguine" that the GSL was turning a corner in its approach to the IDP issue. He cited the recent visit of the Indian Tamil-Nadu parliamentarians to the camps -- something that would never have been considered earlier -- as evidence of the GSL's loosening up on the issue. In connection with that visit, Jayasinghe said the GSL pledged to the Indians that 54,000 IDPs would be released by the end of the month. He claimed a tacit deal was reached with the Indians that they could take credit for gaining the IDPs, freedom in exchange for moderating their public statements on the IDP issue. The secretary thought it was significant that, unlike past GSL pledges to release specific numbers of IDPs, this time the government told the Indians privately that it would honor the target figure.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: The proof of the pudding is in the tasting, and in the case of IDPs in Sri Lanka, triply so; embassy has

learned only to believe GSL pronouncements about IDP returns when people actually arrive at their old homes. Nevertheless, there may be some truth to Jayasinghe's observations that the mood in the government is changing. We cannot confirm the 54,000 release figure by the end of the month that he cited, but the GSL has made several announcements about speeding up returns. Also, General Fonseka's open-secret consideration of running for president has lessened enthusiasm in leadership circles for the military. This might make it easier for civilian authorities to move IDPs from transit camps to their homes, movements which the military earlier had carte blanche to block at the local level due to security considerations. In any case, we will be watching closely for any evidence of whether the GSL is beginning to change its approach.

BUTENIS